

21 June 1992

MEMORANDUM

TO: John Steinbruner

FROM: Elisa D. Harris

SUBJECT: Meselson Visit to Sverdlovsk

Matt called shortly before 11:30 AM today to tell me about his trip to Sverdlovsk. We talked for roughly 90 minutes and only skimmed the surface. He would very much like to come to DC for a "debriefing" and suggested a number of people to include, in addition to CISAC members: Alex Langmuir (School Public Health, Johns Hopkins); Jim Steele (leading US FHS official); Bob Mikulak; Jack Melling (Porton BW expert); Julian Perry Robinson; Nikita Smidovich (Russian Foreign Ministry CBW official, currently in NY). He proposed to do this June 29 or 30, and said that it would take the better part of a day to outline the new information. — No!!

Matt's team was comprised of Jeanne Guillemin, Alex Shelokov, David Walker (a Texas pathologist), Martin Hugh Jones (a veterinarian), and Olga Yampolskaya (who was Nikiforov's assistant). Yampolskaya, Walker, Dr. Abramova (who treated the early victims) and Dr. Grinberg (who worked with Abramova), are preparing a medical paper on the incident. Matt will incorporate this paper in a wider report which he hopes to publish. — yes

Abramova and Grinberg showed the team autopsy tissue and organs from 42 victims. All had severe lung damage. 39 of the 42 also had gastrointestinal damage, but this was believed to have been a consequence of a systemic infection carried via the blood stream. None of this had been revealed to Matt previously or mentioned by Nikiforov et al when they were here in 1988. Matt acknowledged that he had been misled. Walker is convinced based on his examination of these materials that the victims died after inhaling anthrax. Most of the illnesses occurred within a ten day to 2 week period, beginning on 4 April. Patients died within hours of the onset of symptoms.

The team compiled a list of victims from a variety of sources, including the cemetery where they were buried. A list was also provided to them by an oblast official. According to markers in the cemetery, all of the victims died in April and May. Guillemin interviewed the families of some 2 dozen victims. The others are being tracked down and interviewed by a Russian sociologist. Most of the victims lived in dwellings located between the military facility and a ceramics factory 3 kilometers away. One of the people Guillemin interviewed said that diseased meat had been burned at the ceramics factory, leaving open the possibility that the outbreak was unrelated to the military facility. However, the team was unable to determine whether there had been an anthrax problem among livestock in the period before the human outbreak. One SES (Sverdlovsk public health) official said that there was, while another claimed there was not. Veterinarians and others that may have had information about any livestock problem apparently either were not permitted or were unwilling to talk with the team.

Matt talked with Pyotr Burgasov and Vladimir Sergiev, both of whom gave

presentations here in 1988, as well as with Vladimir Nikiforov's son (who apparently did/does work on toxins in the military part of the Ministry of Health). Sergiev said that he had no knowledge of medical evidence that the victims had died from inhaling anthrax. Olga Yampolskaya said that Nikiforov only spoke of a "systemic" infection. Nikiforov's son, however, said that his father believed that there had been inhalatory anthrax, but had been pressured into saying it was gastrointestinal.